

Domus Pacis Family Respite founder steps back, hires new executive director

| August 5, 2020....[Jefferson Geiger](#)



Marylouise "Duck" White-Petteruti, founder of Domus Pacis Family Respite, and new Executive Director Ken Maldonado pose for a portrait Saturday, Aug. 1, on the property of the first respite house in Breckenridge. Founded in 2007, Domus Pacis has provided about 1,300 cancer patients, along with their families and friends, the opportunity to spend a week in Summit County experiencing the beauty of the mountains and the peace that comes from creating joyful memories with the people they most cherish.

Photo by Jason Connolly

FRISCO — Since 2007, [Domus Pacis Family Respite](#) has coordinated respite stays for about 1,300 families so that they can stop worrying about health care — such as hospice or cancer treatment — and spend a relaxing week together in the mountains. While typical vacationers might see their emotional or physical batteries start to drain as soon as they return to work, founder Marylouise “Duck” White-Petteruti said those who stay with Domus Pacis are frequently renewed when looking back at their time in the High Country.

“There’s a lot of emotional, mental and spiritual needs that aren’t being addressed during treatment,” White-Petteruti said. “Even though it’s only one week, healing therapy begins and conversations happen.”

Those conversations might involve reconnecting with family members after cancer strained the relationships or planning for a funeral service. White-Petteruti said those conversations are able to happen because Domus Pacis acts as a concierge, taking much of the logistical load off the guests.

Other than paying for travel to Summit County, families don't have to make any sort of itinerary for their respite. White-Petteruti and her staff round up in-kind donations, so the lodging, food and activities are all provided. That frequently means people staying in an unoccupied second home, receiving freshly cooked comfort food made by community members, and partaking in guided outdoor hikes or something mellower like making art in a studio.

“To have perfect strangers not only donate these homes, timeshares and lodges, but to have a community of strangers reach out to them is so powerfully healing,” White-Petteruti said. “Respite is one element of the healing that we can provide that no one else is providing for them.

“We, the whole Domus Pacis community, just love on them. Love is very healing. When you give a lot of love, you get a lot of love in return.”

This year, however, the coronavirus pandemic meant canceling 27 trips from March to mid-July to protect the organization's immunocompromised clientele. Domus Pacis started providing grief stays again last month, meaning the family's loved one has died — often before they could use the already booked respite.

Gone are the activities and personable food deliveries, and the nonprofit is sensitive to the fact that businesses might not be financially able to donate services. Though White-Petteruti has found people are happy to take a nature walk themselves and stay in for dinner as a family.

Yet the mission isn't any different than when White-Petteruti was inspired to form the nonprofit back in 2001. Her mother died from cancer in 1997, but before then, the Chicagoan had one last girls trip to Breckenridge to visit a plot of land that would be White-Petteruti's future home. She was touched by the town's open arms and by the fact that her mom frequently pulled out a photo album of the trip.

“When God gave me this inspiration, told me what I was to do, we understood why,” she said. “This was a community that would get it. People here want to serve. They want to share their blessings. We're in paradise.”

She left her technology-focused job in the advertising industry to form the nonprofit, and White-Petteruti, now 70, wants to keep the organization alive beyond her leadership. She stepped back from being the executive director, and her husband, Vince White-Petteruti, took her position as president of the board.

A fresh face

Domus Pacis is still looking for five or six board members, but another organizational change — one that White-Petteruti has had in the works for four years — was completed when Ken

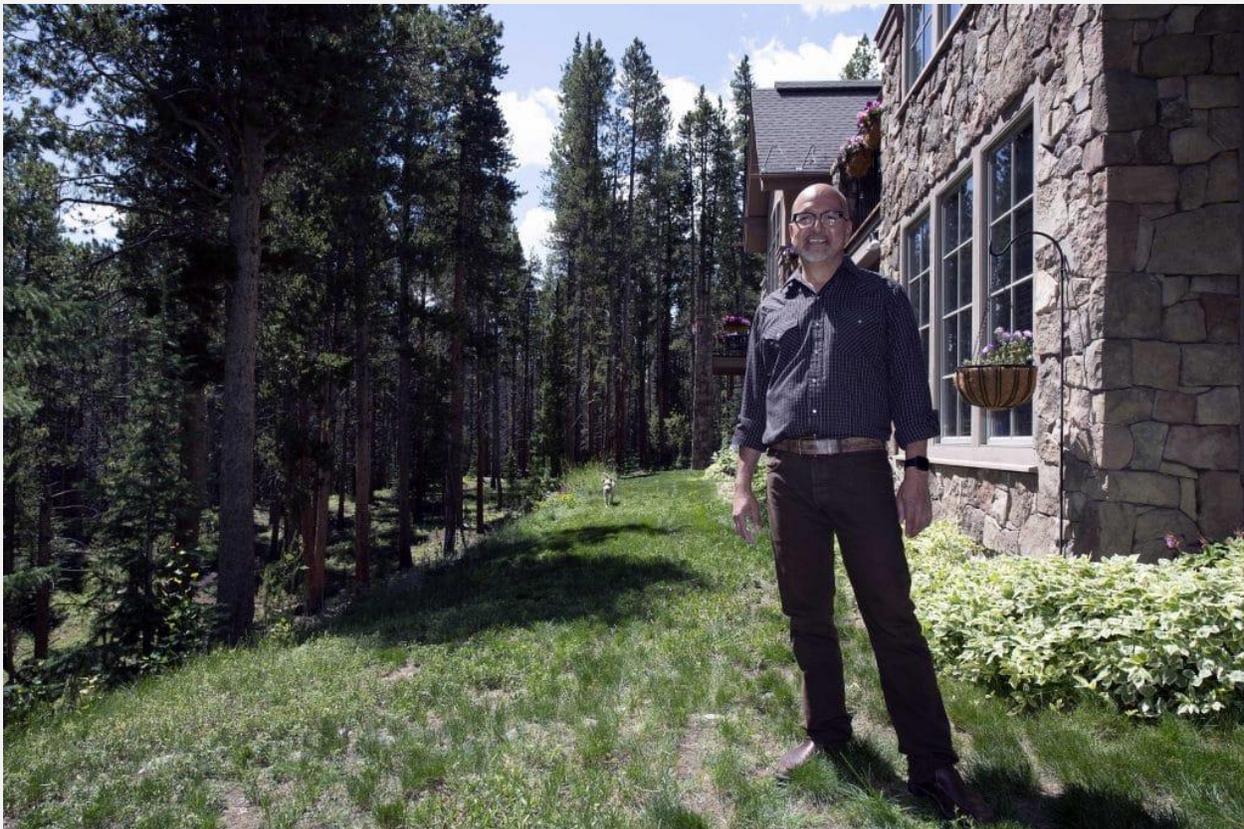
Maldonado was hired to be the new executive director. He has both the spiritual connection and business acumen that she was looking for.

“I truly feel I brought everything to the playing field,” White-Petteruti said. “I had to learn things I never wanted to learn, no desire to learn, to get it to where it is. ... He’s the only person of everybody we interviewed in four years that I felt so confident about.”

Maldonado and the White-Petterutis met once before he applied for the job. Last September, they were on pilgrimages to Israel with their respective parishes when the small groups joined together for logistical reasons. Along with the White-Petterutis, the Summit County travelers included volunteers and other people connected with Domus Pacis. Maldonado — who wanted to work with nonprofits again after a three-year job with Alaska Airlines in Boise, Idaho — was hearing about the respite services whenever they socialized.

He applied in October, and his first day in the office was in March.

“I’m honored to be the one they chose for this transition because I couldn’t do what they’re doing, and that’s hand over something I created to new leadership.”



Ken Maldonado, the new executive director of Domus Pacis Family Respite, poses for a portrait Saturday, Aug. 1, at the first respite house in Breckenridge. *Photo by Jason Connolly*

Over the years, Maldonado has served in roles such as executive director, founder and producer for various nonprofits. The bulk of his career has been with development and fundraising in Manhattan’s performing arts world, but he also has worked with intercity housing, a children’s

mental hospital, an AIDS clinic and a homeless shelter in New York and Colorado. For him, it's about giving back.

“It comes down to making a difference in the world,” Maldonado said. “It’s not about the amount of money you’re going to make or what you’re going to achieve in a certain way. It’s really about doing something that’s going to make a difference in somebody else’s life.”

Living in New York was always his dream, but family brought the New Mexican back West and eventually to Alamosa, where he joined in on the pilgrimage.

He credits White-Petteruti with setting up a solid system, and he doesn't have plans for major structural adjustments.

“Being able to accomplish what I’m able to accomplish as the single staff person right now would not be possible if it wasn’t for the way she set that organization up,” Maldonado said.

Because of the pandemic, his main focus is working with an advisory board of medical professionals around the state to expand the respite services to people healthy enough to visit. That would include front-line workers or Domus Pacis’ referral network of oncologists, radiologists and social workers along with cancer survivors in remission. While they missed out on an estimated \$50,000 from canceled tribute concert fundraisers, Maldonado knows people are burned out on virtual events and isn't ready to start a campaign in that vein yet.

“When it comes to fundraising, the people that believe in these organizations are going to continue to believe, and the contributions will still come through,” he said. “At this point, it’s about staying connected. ... I’m excited for the possibilities of the future; there’s all kinds of ideas.”